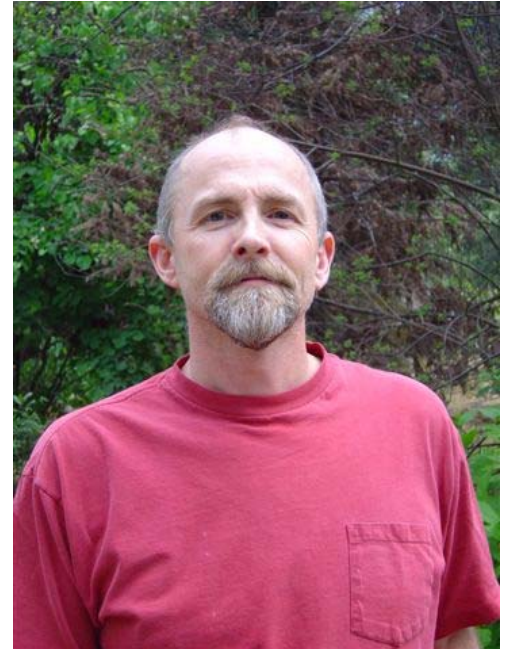




## Big Shoes to Fill

**WANTED – FIRE MANAGEMENT OFFICER. JOB IS REWARDING AND CHALLENGING. APPLICANT NEEDS TO BE A STRONG LEADER, A GOOD LISTENER, A FAIR DECISION-MAKER, AND MUST NOT BE AFRAID TO FILL SOME REALLY BIG SHOES.**

After nine years as the Fire Management Officer of Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks (SEKI), William Kaage will become the Deputy Regional Fire Management Officer for the Pacific West Region of the National Park Service. Because of his leadership, the fire program at SEKI has been breaking new ground, maintaining past successes, and shaping policy beyond park boundaries and across land management agencies.



Kaage arrived in Three Rivers with his wife and two daughters in the summer of 1996 after leaving his job as the Fire Management Officer for Everglades National Park in Florida. “I got here during a busy fire season with lots of controversy,” said Kaage. “It was a tough situation to walk into, but it helped me develop a vision for the future of the program.”

From that difficult beginning, Kaage’s vision and actions focused on building a truly integrated fire and fuels management program based on resource objectives, park goals, and team work. Building on accomplishments that started in the late-1960s, Kaage’s fire program ignited approximately 17,000 acres of prescribed burning and managed 23,600 acres of lightning-caused fires over nine years. “This work has left a positive legacy,” says Russel J. Wilson, Acting Superintendent. “The forests in these parks were shaped by fire and still depend on it to maintain healthy ecosystems. Kaage ran a program that allowed this natural process to safely continue while balancing the needs of park visitors and local communities.”

In addition to his operational experience, Kaage has been an innovative, forward-thinking manager. He was never afraid to brainstorm new ideas or challenge his staff and peers to think outside the box. He supported and planned exciting fire research projects, served as the Chair of the Southern Sierra Fire Management Officers, guided a new landscape treatment analysis process, and spearheaded the interagency Southern Sierra Geographic Information Cooperative (SSGIC) which has become one of four Fire Program Analysis (FPA) prototype areas in the country.

Despite all of the success, the last nine years were not free of controversy or challenge. Kaage led the program and its staff through difficult issues like smoke management, damage to the Washington Tree, and the tragic death of a firefighter. He demonstrated that a fire program can withstand difficult times and still find the motivation to continue.

While SEKI is sorry to see him go, the National Park Service will still benefit from Kaage’s talents. These parks were lucky to have him and hope that his experience at Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks will serve him well in the future.